

For Immediate Release

<p>Event: Friday Rally and March Call for an End to the Siege of the People of Gaza.</p> <p>Date: Friday, January 25, 2008</p> <p>Time: 5:00 PM</p> <p>Place: Pioneer Courthouse Square, SW Broadway & SW Yamhill, downtown Portland</p>	<p>Contacts: Portland Peaceful Response Coalition (503) 344-5078 pprc@riseup.net www.pprc-news.org</p>
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Friday Rally and March Call for an End to the Siege of the People of Gaza.
*National Mobilization calling for Comprehensive Ceasefire
and an End to US Military Aid to Israel.*

This Friday's rally and march at Pioneer Courthouse Square draws attention to the ongoing blockade of Gaza, recently breached by the Palestinian people as they streamed across a barrier wall, destroyed this week in several places along the border with Egypt. "Our brothers and sisters in Gaza are suffering and dying, serious malnutrition is increasing and urgent medical care is becoming impossible, because of the tightening US-supported Israeli blockade," said William Seaman, a volunteer with *Portland Peaceful Response Coalition*. "This courageous defiance by the people of Gaza at the border with Egypt will ease some of the suffering, but it does not change the fact that Israel's illegal collective punishment of Gaza has to stop, the borders must be open to allow crossings by people and goods." The Friday rally gathers at 5:00 PM at the corner of SW Yamhill and Broadway at Pioneer Courthouse Square in downtown Portland.

The Israeli military has continued to escalate its attacks on Gaza, killing more than 40 Palestinians just this past week and causing grievous injuries to dozens more. The territory of Gaza, one of the most densely populated regions in the world, has been under siege and in recent days has been subjected by Israel to a complete lockdown. The escalation in the blockade has virtually cut off what little access the besieged population had to food, fuel, clean water and ever-more-urgent medical services. This past Sunday Gaza's only power generator was shut down because of a lack of fuel; hospitals have been affected and Palestinian medical officials reported five gravely ill patients had died.

Israel's announcement, under international pressure, that it would allow one day's worth of fuel to re-start Gaza's only power generating plant will not end the crisis; Gaza remains desperate as Israel continues to use the access to vitally needed fuel and other goods as a weapon of occupation to impose collective punishment on the entire population of Gaza. As the conditions in Gaza worsen, international solidarity organizations in London, Rome and elsewhere around the world are mobilizing to demand an end to the siege of Gaza in protests set for January 26. That same day Israeli peace groups are organizing an emergency convoy to try to break the siege. Portland's Friday rally and march support this international mobilization and will fundraise for the emergency convoy and for other relief programs for Gaza.

Israel's increasing attacks on Gaza – the economic blockade and military assaults – are not in response to the rocket attacks from Gaza. The Israeli attacks, and Israel's continuing occupation-through-siege of Gaza, are the reason for the rocket fire in the first place. Even if one were to accept that the Israeli attacks were in response to Gaza rockets, the Israeli response would still be illegal (collective punishment is always illegal), disproportionate, and ultimately futile.

U.S. military support bolsters Israel's occupation and enables the current escalating punishment. The U.S. must stop all military aid to Israel, and demand that Israel end its collective punishment and indiscriminate bombing of the civilian population of Gaza. Further, the U.S. must push for a comprehensive ceasefire that covers all the occupied Palestinian territories. Otherwise, the U.S. will continue to be vilified for its support of collective punishment and attacks on civilians, and U.S. citizens will be seen by the rest of the world as complicit in major human rights violations.

As in recent weeks, this week's Friday rally proceeds in the face of ongoing uncertainty regarding "noise" citations. Representatives from *Portland Peaceful Response Coalition* and *Peace & Justice Works*, accompanied by local legal support, met with City of Portland representatives last week. Discussions are continuing but a resolution has not yet been reached. *Portland Peaceful Response Coalition* has started a "Friday rally legal defense fund". Donations can be made through their website at www.pprc-news.org or by mailing donations to PO Box 5112, Portland, OR 97208-5112 (please make checks payable to "PPRC" and write "Friday Rally Legal Defense Fund" in the memo line of the check).

1. This press release is based in part on a communiqué issued by the *US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation*. For more information, please visit their website at www.endtheoccupation.org